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Introduction

The Conference on Jewish Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism, which met in Frankfurt a.M. in December 1991, was the Fifth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism in Memory of Gershom Scholem. It was the first such conference to meet outside of Jerusalem, and the first to be dedicated to a geographical region rather than a historical period. The first four conferences in this series were convened in Jerusalem, in the halls of the Israel Academy of Sciences and the Humanities; Gershom Scholem was president of the Academy for many years. They were dedicated, in a chronological progression, to four key periods in the history of Jewish mysticism: The first concentrated on ancient Jewish mysticism, the Hekhalot and Merkabah literature; the second - to the beginnings of Jewish mysticism in medieval Europe; the third - to the Age of the Zohar, and the fourth - the Kabbalah in Safed and the Lurianic Kabbalah. Proceedings of these four conferences were published in Jerusalem, as volumes in the *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, between 1986 and 1993. All the conferences were convened, in two-years intervals, near the date of Gershom Scholem's death, February 21st (1982).

This time, the two-years interval was not observed, and the Fifth Conference met less than a year after the previous one. The Fourth conference, on Safed and Luria, met in Jerusalem in February 1991, during the Gulf War, when Israel was under attack by missiles from Iraq. It was an unusually successful conference - all the participants stayed throughout the lectures and debates, sitting with their gas masks on the table in front of them, and had nowhere else to go - all public activities and institutions having been suspended, and the Conference was 'the only show in town'. Despite the situation, the participants invited from the United States and Europe arrived safely and took part in the conference. This can be taken as an indication of the continued vitality and meaning of Gershom Scholem's revolutionary scholarly achievements: during the tenth year after his death, three such conferences were convened, in Jerusalem, in Frankfurt and the sixth, in Berlin (February 1992); all of them had well-defined subjects, full schedules, lively debates, and all their Proceedings were published in volumes which include detailed studies of central subjects concerning the history of Jewish mysticism.

The Frankfurt Conference, the only one among the six dedicated to a region, expressed the intensification of interest in the history of Jewish

mysticism in Germany and central Europe, the area known in Hebrew as 'Ashkenaz'. Some of the major developments which marked the emergence of Jewish mysticism in Europe in its various schools and tendencies occurred in Germany in the late twelfth and during the thirteenth century. After that, this area did not cease to be one of the centers of Jewish mystical creativity. Even when the main centers of Jewish mystical schools were in the Provence and in Spain, in Italy, in the Ottoman Empire and in *Erez Yisrael*, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, there were always connections with groups and schools in Germany. Every major development elsewhere had an impact, an echo, or further development, in the German realm.

The history of Jewish mysticism, even though its centers moved from 'sefardi' to 'ashkenazi' realms and back, was never exclusively 'sefardi' or 'ashkenazi'. Scores of important and influential Jewish mystics moved from 'sefardi' to 'ashkenazi' cultural realms and vice versa, carrying with them their local traditions, teachings and insights. Thus, the history of Jewish mysticism in Ashkenaz includes all the major themes and all the meaningful phenomena of Jewish mysticism as a whole.

Almost half of the lectures delivered on the conference, and the studies presented in this volume, relate fully or in part to one of the most meaningful aspects of Jewish mystical creativity during the Middle Ages: The circles of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, or Jewish pietism in Medieval Germany, which flourished mainly in the second half of the twelfth century and during the thirteenth. This phenomenon, first comprehensively presented in the third chapter of Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, is different from all other cultural developments in Judaism in the Middle Ages by being centered in Germany, and reflecting the specific circumstances and cultural characteristics of the Jews in central Europe. Its main schools and circles were in the Rhineland, but it spread, on the one hand, east to the German heartland and to Bohemia and further east, and on the other - to northern France. It is the most prominent 'Ashkenazi' spiritual development in an era in which most of Jewish creativity in the spiritual realms was centered in southern Europe, in the Provence, Spain, Italy, Northern Africa, Egypt, Byzantium and *Erez Yisrael*. The writings of the circles of these esoterics, mystics and pietists which are grouped, rather inaccurately, under the title of 'Ashkenazi Hasidism' remain still, to a large extent, in manuscripts. In the last two decades several treatises were published in traditional, inaccurate editions. The Ashkenazi Hasidic heritage had a lasting impact on Ashkenazi-Jewish culture in the following centuries, becoming one of the characteristics of this culture, and some of its ideas, symbols and methodologies were integrated in the Kabbalah and became an integral part of Kabbalistic traditions up to modern times.

The Frankfurt conference, and the volume presented here, is especially important, because of the complete absence of this meaningful phenomenon

from the history of religious cultures in medieval Germany as presented in contemporary scholarship. It seems that most scholars in this field are not aware even of its existence, and no attempt has been made to integrate it within the comprehensive presentations of mysticism and piety in central Europe in the High Middle Ages. The material concerning Ashkenazi Hasidism is extant mainly in Hebrew, almost no text has been translated into German (or English, though a French translation of the *Sefer Hasidim* has been published recently), and most of the scholarly work in this field has been done in Hebrew. In the last few years a very modest change seems to be occurring, one of its expressions being the inclusion of this subject in the Proceedings of a previous conference in Frankfurt, dedicated to Jewish culture and history in Germany (edited by K. E. Grözinger¹). There is some reason to believe that today historians of Medieval Germany are more aware of the Jewish aspect of their subject, and are willing to include it in their studies, in contradiction to the prevailing attitude before, during and after the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. There are very few books written in Germany in the High Middle Ages which reflect in such detail and intensity the life and culture of the period, social and economic structures and conventions, popular and intellectual beliefs, customs and relationships, attitudes towards minorities and gender, concepts of education and of property, and many other subjects, like the *Sefer Hasidim*. Despite the deep gulf separating Jews and Christians in this period, which followed immediately - and reflected - the persecutions and massacres of the period of the crusades - Jews and Christians did live together in dozens of towns in Germany, and even the contradictions reflected historical reality and cultural trends. Any separation between the study of these communities severely cripples historical understanding of both of them. Attempts by scholars in Jewish studies to integrate the study of Jewish culture in Germany in the Middle Ages within the parallel developments in German society as a whole were partial and sporadic, and did not lead to a comprehensive understanding; from the other side, it seems, even such incomplete endeavors are missing. It is hoped that this conference, and this volume, will contribute, however modestly, to increase interest in this subject among the scholarly community in Germany and enhance the possibility of the emergence of truly balanced and correct historical studies of this period and this subject.

The studies in this volume survey some chapters of the history of Kabbalah in Germany from the thirteenth century onwards, and several other studies deal with one of the most traumatic, and historically meaningful, off-shoots of Jewish mysticism: the messianic movement of Shabbatianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This cataclysmic event, which was centered in the Ottoman empire, began a century and a half of turmoil and

¹ *Judentum im deutschen Sprachraum*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991.

controversy, which reached and divided Jewish intellectuals and mystics in several Jewish centers in Germany. The intense messianic awakening in this period met and clashed with the increasing interest of Jews in the German culture around them, and in the eighteenth century Germany was the scene in which the most dynamic and vibrant elements of Jewish tradition were in constant conflict with the emerging movement of the Jewish enlightenment. The radical heretic Frankist movement had its center in Germany at the same time that the most important works of Moses Mendelssohn and other enlightenment thinkers were written there.

In the nineteenth century, while Eastern Europe was engulfed by the schism between the new Hasidic movement and its opponents, both of them representing new phases in the development of Jewish mysticism, German Jewry began the scholarly study of the Kabbalah. Attitudes towards Jewish mysticism differed categorically: in the 1840s Heinrich Graetz began to publish a series of studies of ancient and medieval Jewish mystical works, motivated by a definite negative attitude towards this phenomenon, and at the same time a young scholar, M. H. Landauer, was so engulfed by the mystical works of Abraham Abulafia and other mystics whose writings he read in the manuscript libraries, that he became a mystic himself. During the next half-century, the rationalistic and critical attitude towards the mystical aspect of Judaism increased, and when Gershom Scholem started his scholarly enterprise in the second decade of the twentieth century it was the established attitude, with few exceptions.

Gershom Scholem represents, to a very large extent, the combination and fusion of the two conflicting attitudes towards Jewish mysticism which marked nineteenth-century German Jewry: In his rebellious character, he contradicted the norms of the surrounding society and developed a deep empathy towards the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition, including the Kabbalah, attitudes which led him to adopt Zionism and to immigrate to *Erez Yisrael*. On the other hand, he was completely integrated in the critical, scholarly concepts of the historical-philological schools of the European academic world and the scholarly studies of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school. He criticized their enmity to the mystical aspect of Judaism in the harshest terms, but used their methodologies in order to establish a historical, precise picture of the development of the various traditions of Jewish mystical creativity. This fusion did not develop easily: when Scholem began his work he was so influenced by the mystical treatises he was studying that he accepted, with reservations, the Kabbalists' own view of the antiquity of their traditions. Only gradually did he adopt a more rigorous historical approach, which enabled him to identify the medieval character of most Kabbalistic traditions. He thus moved from writing based on faith to a reliance on textual and historical analysis, rejecting Kabbalistic orthodoxy, and laying the foundation for modern scholarship in the field of Jewish mysticism.

The centrality of Ashkenaz both in the history of Jewish mysticism and in the study of the subject in the last century and a half justify the insistence on including Germany in the contemporary map of scholarship in the field of Jewish mysticism. The Frankfurt conference, and the Berlin conference which followed it, should be viewed within this framework. There are, today, several scholars in major universities in Germany, some of whom are represented in this volume, who dedicate their efforts to this subject, in full or part. German universities have awarded advanced degrees in this subject to young scholars, and several scholarly projects concerning Hebrew mystical texts have been carried out or are in preparation. It is hoped that this volume will serve as an encouragement for the continuation of this process.

The Frankfurt symposium could not have taken place without the substantial support of the *Fritz Thyssen Stiftung* in Köln which, moreover, has made this publication possible, thus promoting the study of Jewish mysticism most effectively.

The *Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt a.M.*, the partner university of the *Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, hosted this partnership conference.

Since music is an integral element of Jewish mysticism, the conference culminated in a magnificent concert of Hebrew hymns and cantatas originating from the spirit of the Kabbalah, planned by Professor Israel Adler from the Hebrew University and performed by the *Junge Kantorei Frankfurt am Main* and the *Ensemble La Fantasia* directed by Joachim Martini. The concert was recorded and broadcast by the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* in Munich. This moving mystical-musical experience was made possible by the generous help of the *Jehoshua and Hanna Bubis-Stiftung*, Frankfurt a.M., the City of Frankfurt and the *Stiftung Allgemeine Hypothekenbank* in Frankfurt.

The editors of this publication, who organized the symposium, would like to express their thanks to the above mentioned foundations and donators, as well as to the scholars and musicians whose support and work contributed to the instructive and fruitful days at the home of a former *Ir we-Em be Yisrael*.

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